

Virtual Engagement – Establishing Community

Having a sense of community in the classroom builds caring culture and motivates learners to attend and do their best. We typically spend a generous amount of time to rules and conversations that connect us, and we need this for our learners to care in the remote environment. Following are some tips and ideas.

- Tap students' generous instincts to motivate the remote work. For example, brainstorm, "What is good about virtual school, and what could be better?" Talk about small solutions: What can you do to make the situation (or learning) better for yourself? Your family? Your friends? Younger children? The teachers? Families with limited Internet? Kids whose parents work away from home?
- Use the [Blue Sky Activity](#) to envision an optimal remote situation and embrace the creativity, strategies, and wonder of the youth.
- Use a project approach with flexible modes of learning and expression and clear rubric of outcomes and quality indicators. Make sure students are doing more work than the teacher – they are driving the learning with their interests.
- Use of specific examples, video, and voice instructions to support ELL students and struggling readers. Separate assignments and flexibility in group work may help ELL students get credit for work they complete.
- Greet and interact with students through video and encourage them to share their voice and image regularly. Start with a creative hello and daily questions.
- A team of teachers/staff/learners may record morning announcements and put them on Google classroom.
- Provide journal prompts for continual reflection and questioning. Use all of the intelligences to get learners engaged in reflection. Vary the reflection prompts - using stems from Bloom's or DOK help build stronger questions.
- Check in regularly and give feedback. Encourage student reflection as well.
- In a Google form, have each learner set a weekly goal for their learning as well as reflect on how their teacher can help them achieve that goal. Schedule one-on-one interviews with students to check in and discuss learning progression. Ask, "What can I do as your teacher to help make it easier to learn at home?"
- Make it clear when and how you are available for instructions and questions. Set online hours to be available to answer questions. For middle school, it's a great idea to do a survey about student sleep/work habits before you decide when to hold class meetings or interviews. They will only be there if it fits their schedule.
- [Map Your Heartbreak](#) is an activity that helps everyone discover and communicate about their areas of interest and potential service-learning.
- Let student interests determine deeper learning in a context they care about. For example, if students care about the environment, projects and skills can be taught in that context. If someone's passion is cooking, they can learn reading, math, art, nutrition, science, and



history in that context. A service project may involve teaching a webinar on simple, healthy recipes with limited budget. Their personal commitment and voice can determine direction and what they have the capacity for.

- Use video (asynchronous instruction) so students can learn on their best schedule, then hold them accountable for viewing and responding. Check in regularly and reflect. Video can also be used to keep them connected and build community. Video may be used for daily teacher announcements, motivational messages, social-emotional engagements, and mindfulness video clips to increase engagement and response to trauma.
- Attach to video assignments specific documents learners must complete and turn in. They are more likely to complete it if it is attached.
- Provide tips for parents/caregivers to be involved and enjoy the learning experience. Involve families in projects. A "Parent University" can teach parents some basics about our online learning platforms and how they can make sure their children are doing the work.
- Check in regularly and personally. Listen more than you talk.
- Relax about perfection in videos and let your students see you make mistakes. They love to see your face and the faces of their friends. They don't always want to be seen, so don't force them to turn on video. Encourage chatting in the text box to warm them up.
- Also, find videos online made by experts rather than re-doing, whenever possible.
- Ask students to share videos with you and their classmates, demonstrating their knowledge. Use Flipgrid or Seesaw as a way to share student videos/reflections for both quick responses and more developed demonstration of learning. FlipGrid has a Graffiti Wall that allows students to post sayings, anecdotes, pictures, and video clips.
- Use primary sources and literature as learning tools and connectors to community and other disciplines.

